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TREE PLANTING in NEIGHBORHOODS

Prepared by the San Francisco Department of City Planning to Assist Neighborhood Projects

DECEMBER 1974

The Benefits of Street Trees

Street trees can improve the quality of our living environment. They add a sense of nature and visual relief from the barren and often harsh urban scene. Decorative or ornamental trees that line many neighborhood sidewalks are particularly important in San Francisco where, because of the density of development and the lack of building setbacks and side yards, there are few other opportunities for landscaping.

From a practical point of view, trees can be a good financial investment. Some people in the real estate business believe that trees increase property values by $1,000, and up to $2,000 to $3,000 if the entire block is planted. Also, trees are the kind of improvement that do not result in tax assessment increases.

In addition to their visual benefits, street trees make the city a more healthy place in which to live. They

filter dirt from the atmosphere
replenish oxygen in the air we breathe
muffle street noises
serve as wind breaks

Considering all these benefits, it is no surprise that neighborhood residents and organizations have planted more than 130,000 street trees over the past twenty years. This is a considerable achievement for San Francisco. The City is anxious to encourage further planting efforts, and this newsletter is designed to help you get started.

The Program

The responsibility for overseeing tree planting in San Francisco rests with

The Street Planting Division
Department of Public Works
2323 Army Street
San Francisco, Ca. 94124 558-3377

The functions of the Division are twofold. First, in order to insure that trees are sensibly located with respect to underground utilities, hydrants, traffic signs, and driveways, San Francisco's Planting Ordinance requires that property owners apply for a "Tree Planting Permit." There is no charge for this permit which is issued by the Division following a site inspection and review of the application.

The second function is to provide assistance to individual and group projects as part of the Neighborhood Tree Planting Program. The Division advises and suggests ideas on all aspects of tree planting, including selection of species, proper planting methods, and proper maintenance. When possible, the Division provides support stakes, straps, and bricks - FREE OF CHARGE - to groups organizing a planting project.

The details of planting and caring for your tree are spelled out in the *Information Kit* prepared by the Division and available to the public at no cost. For those of you who are planning to organize a planting project, you should get a kit and read through it as soon as possible.

Projects under the Neighborhood Tree Planting Program typically involve a one or two block area. Property owners choose the type and number of trees to be planted and assume the expense of purchase and installation. The Street Planting Division is ready to provide direct assistance and arrange for the sidewalk to be cut and the concrete removed for projects of 10 or more trees.

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Selecting Your Tree

A wide variety of trees are known to grow well in San Francisco. Our frost free climate allows for many species of subtropical broadleaf evergreens that provide year-round foliage. There are, however, significant differences in climate and wind conditions within the City, and careful consideration must be given to the microclimate of each neighborhood including local soil composition and drainage. The Street Planting Division will gladly recommend species for your particular location.

To observe a display of specimen trees that are commonly found in San Francisco, visit San Francisco Beautiful's Street Tree Exhibit which is on Funston Avenue, between Geary and Fulton. A pamphlet guide for the exhibit is available from

San Francisco Beautiful
120 Bush Street
San Francisco, Ca. 94104 986-1010

Costs

Street trees are surprisingly inexpensive, although rare species can cost in the thousands of dollars. For the more common varieties, the cost can be as little as $10-$15, or as much as $40-$45, depending on the size of the tree, the quantity purchased, and the availability of the species. Tree sizes vary according to the size of the container in which they are grown, the most common being 5, 10, or 15 gallon sizes. If you hire the nursery to plant the trees for you, expect to pay $30 or more per tree for this service.

Other costs include buying the stakes and straps for supporting the tree, the topsoil for planting, and the bricks for paving the hole once the tree is installed. Also, unless you can borrow a dump truck, you may have to rent a debris box or 'dumpster' ($45) for removing unwanted materials.

In addition to the Street Planting Division and San Francisco Beautiful, there are two other organizations which help with financial and other aspects of tree planting:

Richmond Environmental Action
13 Columbus Avenue
San Francisco, Ca. 94111 391-6307

Trees for the City
740 Francisco Street
San Francisco, Ca. 94133 775-1697

FIRST STEPS

1. Selecting your leadership

Appoint or elect a leader from your neighborhood group to organize and carry out the tree planting project. This person should be able to devote a substantial amount of time to the project over a period of three to four months, and should be determined to see it through to completion. The project leader should be assisted by three or four persons who form a steering committee.

2. Learning the details

Familiarize yourself with the details of tree planting projects by reading the material in the information kit. Talk to the Street Planting Division and nurseries about good trees for your area, and get some rough cost estimates. Have the Division send you as many permit applications as you think you will need.

3. Contacting your neighbors

Using the City's form letter in the information kit, or one you write yourself, contact your neighbors by mail or telephone and explain briefly what you have in mind. Invite them to your house for a meeting to discuss the project.

4. Enlisting support

At a meeting or coffee clatch, explain in more detail what you are trying to accomplish. Have some information available on the various types of trees that would be appropriate in the neighborhood, and be prepared to give some indication of costs.

5. Preparing a plan

Once you know approximately how many neighbors will participate in the project, you can prepare a rough sketch of the street and sidewalk where the trees will be planted. Indicate on the plan where the driveways, hydrants, telephone poles, and underground utility terminals are located. Think about where trees might best be located, and indicate them on the map.

6. Choosing your trees

Organize a tree selection committee to work with the Division in choosing trees for your street. If possible, settle on one species for the whole project to provide the most effective visual impact. However, those with strong preferences for a different species should be encouraged to plant them.

7. Preparing cost estimates

Shop around for the best price for the trees you want. Use the list of nurseries in the information kit, or use the Yellow Pages of the telephone book. Determine the cost of all the materials you will need, and estimate the cost per tree or per household.

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GETTING READY

Applications

Distribute the permit applications to your neighbors and get them filled out and returned to you. Property owners will need to state on the application the number and species of trees they want to plant. Be sure to get their signatures.

Sometimes there is difficulty locating and getting the cooperation of an absentee property owner. Tenants can be helpful in these cases, not only in leading you to the owner but in paying for and installing a tree if the owner is unwilling or unable to do so. You still must get the owner's permission and signature on the permit application. Gather all completed applications and send them to the Street Planting Division.

Setting up financing

Choose a local bank and establish a checking account to handle the financing. The group treasurer should be responsible for collecting each household's share and for paying all the bills.

One way to handle the financing is to set a flat fee for each household to cover the cost of all the materials, a contingency fund for maintenance during the first two years, and a reserve for replacement of trees that get damaged or die. You should be prepared to include the cost of extra trees for those owners willing to have a tree planted, but unwilling or unable to pay.

Reviewing location of trees

After the permits are approved, a representative from the Division will come to discuss the project with the leader and other residents. Preliminary locations of each tree will be marked on the sidewalk, and all property owners will be notified that unless objections are raised, the sidewalk will be cut at the specified spots.

Collecting payment

Make a final tally of participating households and begin collecting payments. Make arrangements with the nursery for the trees you have selected.

It is important that homeowners be asked for only one payment. Do not complicate the project by collecting too little money at first and then having to go back for a second check. One project leader stressed the importance of keeping the project simple--especially for the property owners who you are trying to organize--and found it practical to pay out of her own pocket when necessary to cover for late or insufficient payments from the owners. In most cases, she was paid back.

Prepare for planting

After the locations of the trees are approved, the City will send a crew to the neighborhood to cut the sidewalk where indicated. Expect a 6 to 8 week period for this work to be scheduled and completed.

Soon afterwards, another crew will come to break up the concrete with a jackhammer and remove the debris, exposing the soil underneath. Prior to planting, this subsoil must be removed to a depth of three feet, and disposed of. Retain some of the soil to mix with the new topsoil that you will use. Consult the information kit for details on mixing the topsoil.

FINAL STEPS

If you plan to hire a contractor.....

Settle on one for your project and determine what you want him to do. Make sure that he agrees to dig the hole 3 feet square and 3 feet deep, and that he provides the loam for refilling the hole. Your maintenance contract should be included in the overall price, and you should settle how often the contractor will come to look over the trees.

Select a convenient day for the trees to be installed. Make sure that the contractor performs his duties and that he is paid. After that, your project is complete. In most cases, the contractor should agree to guarantee the health of the tree, and if any trees die within a year, the contractor should replace them.

If you plan to do it yourself.....

Locate a nursery that has the trees you want. Make partial payment with the understanding that the nursery will hold the trees until you are ready to have them delivered.

Arrange to have a debris box or dump truck nearby for the disposal of subsoil and other materials; look in the Yellow Pages under Garbage Collection. If possible, avoid this cost and borrow a truck from a friend or neighbor, and take the debris to the City dump.

Arrange for the delivery of some high quality topsoil from the nursery in the proper quantity.

Select a planting day that is convenient to as many of the owners as possible, and arrange to have the trees delivered on that day. Tell the nursery to drop the trees at the designated spots.

Collect all payments from the property owners and be prepared to make the final payment to the nursery.

On "Planting Day," make sure that there are enough people to do all the work. Plant the trees according to the specifications of the Tree Planting Division, which are included in the informational kits and on the permit application. Pound stakes into the ground and attach support straps. Water the soil thoroughly.

MAINTENANCE TIPS

Feeding — A balanced commercial fertilizer is recommended for feeding trees. Several light applications would be better than one heavy application. Do NOT overfeed.

Pruning — The future health and beauty of your tree depends on early training and pruning. Consult a good text or professional service.

Spraying — Consult your local nurseryman on material for spraying to control insects or disease of a tree.

Support — Inspect the posts and straps frequently. The post should be upright and the straps should not bind the tree.

Clearance — As the tree develops, maintain a clearance of eight feet between the pavement and the lowest limb of the tree.

After 4 to 6 weeks, you should complete your project by paving the tree basin. There are several ways to do this, using either brick, cobblestone, or pre-cast concrete sections to fit around the tree. Treatment of the basin in this manner is highly recommended because it improves the appearance, protects against tripping, and helps keep litter from collecting at the foot of the tree.

If you use bricks, they should be flush with the sidewalk and should be set in mortar if at all possible. Another suggestion is to plant ivy or other flowers in and around the bricks or cobblestones, and let the plants entwine themselves around the support posts.

You might also consider installing a wrought iron protective cage around the trunk of the tree. These items are expensive, but they give a nice appearance and provide substantial protection for the tree.

REFERENCES

Ornamental Trees, Evelyn Maino and Frances Howard, University of California Press, 1972

Trees Make Good Neighbors, Brian Fewer, San Francisco Department of Public Works, 1972

Western Garden Book, Sunset Magazine, Lane Publishing Company